

THERE ARE SO MANY HOUSES AND DARK STREETS WITHOUT HELP

one of my greatest weaknesses is getting lost, I am always getting lost, I have dreams over and over of getting lost, and this is why I fear foreign countries so much: the possibility of getting lost and not knowing the language, what do you do?

I was once lost in the Utah wilderness for nine hours but I often get lost on freeways of my own area -- pulling into a gas station: "give me a couple of gallons of gas. listen, can you tell me where the San Diego Freeway is?"

I find the freeway but get on in the wrong direction, almost know it, drive on fearfully for many miles among hundreds of people who know exactly where they are going, I get off the freeway, try to get on going in the other direction, can't find the entrance, get lost again -- going down a dark road of no lights and darkened houses.

there are so many houses and dark streets without help.

and worse is turning on the car radio and listening to a friendly voice and the music -- it only builds the madness.

there hasn't been a woman I have lived with who hasn't gotten a phone call like this:

"listen, baby, I'm lost, I'm in this phone booth and I don't know where I'm at ..."

"go outside," they say, "and look for a street sign."

I come back with the information and they tell me what to do.

I don't understand the instructions.

there's much screaming, both ways.

"it's simple!" they scream.

"I CAN'T DO IT!" I scream back.

once I rented a motel room.

luckily there was a liquor store across the street.

I got two fifths of vodka and sat up watching tv

pretending that life was good and that I was perfectly normal and in control of proceedings.

I was finally able to sleep shortly after opening the second bottle of vodka.

it was one of those places which required a key deposit

so in the morning when I went down there

I asked the lady, "by the way, could you tell me which way I go to get to L.A.?"

"you're in L.A.," she told me.

once I had been driving for hours and I saw a sign and it said: "San Diego, 45 miles" and I thought, well, I'll drive to San Diego and at least I'll know where I'm at. the problem was that I wasn't too sure that I could find San Diego.

one of the worst was leaving Santa Anita racetrack one evening

I swung off into a side road to get away from traffic and the side road started curving and I got worried about that and cut off into another side road and I don't know how it happened but all the main boulevards vanished and I was just driving along these small roads and then the roads started going upwards as the evening darkened into night and I kept driving, feeling completely idiotic and vanquished

I tried to turn off the upward grades but each turn lead me to a road going higher, and I thought, if I ever see my woman again I'm going to tell her that I'm an idiot, a true subnormal, that I must be fed and kept in bed or that I must be confined to an institution.

I got higher and higher into the hills and then I was on top of whatever it was and there was this village all lit up by neon signs and the language of the signs was all Chinese and then I knew that I was mad.

I had no idea what it meant, I just kept driving and then looking down I saw the Pasadena Freeway. I was a thousand feet above it, all I had to do was to get down there.

and that was another nightmare of trying to work my way down from all those streets of rich dark houses.

the poor will never know how many rich hide out quietly in the hills.

I got down on the freeway after another 45 minutes and, of course, I got on in the wrong direction.

another time I got lost in Long Beach under unfinished freeway roads that dead-ended among huge warehouses at night and a police car passed me and I speeded up and tried to catch the police car but it got away from me when I got switched off onto a side road.

I worked my way out of there only to get caught in the same trap again three weeks later.

I don't like psychiatrists but I've thought about going to them about this but I know what they are finally going to tell me: that what I think it is, it is, but I don't think it's anything, you see, and that's what makes it all so strange.

all the women I've lived with have the same answer: "you're just a fool," they say.

THE PAYOFF

it's down by a track near the border and it's called THE PAYOFF HOTEL and it's directly north of the track perched on a cliff and after the races you can look down at the empty track and see the stables and now and then a horse and always those stacks of hay.

there are hundreds of rooms, all taken, each room with a shower and black and white tv. next to the lobby is a dance floor where some of the players try to dance and romance the few young girls to the loud music of a small band playing thirty year old melodies.

the players drink beer and cheap wine, their shirttails hanging out, their pants too short, their shoes scuffed and down at the heels.

walking through the halls at night, many of the doors are open and in each room sit one or two men reading RACING FORMS and drinking beer and wine, and in the morning by the pool before the races some of them will be dressed in vari-colored trunks, more like wimps than pimps, and they'll each have a copy of THE DAILY RACING FORM.

there aren't any steady winners at THE PAYOFF HOTEL. how they exist is unknown: they are durable and transitory and all the rooms are always taken.

I'll see you there next summer and I won't be able to tell you from them and you'll look like me and I'll look like you and we won't look very good, waiting for the action.

THE CATS' BEHINDS

your niece came and left
and your mother came and left
I outlived their problems
next I will rip up the cornstalks
in the garden,
maybe we can burn them in the fire-
place, ears and all, I have never
burned ears, have you?